

# critical digest

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NEWSLETTER SERVICES

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## New York Theatre Diary

Gently Does It- Playhouse 10/28/53. Edward Choate and George Ross present a new mystery play by Janet Green which was a London hit as Murder Mistaken. With Brenda Bruce, Anthony Oliver, Bretaigne Windust director... A Girl Can Tell-Royale 10/29/53. Aldrich & Myers present a new comedy by F. Hugh Herbert starring Janet Blair. Cast includes Paul McGrath, Jack Whiting, Tod Andrews... Sherlock Holmes-Century 10/30/53 Bill Doll presents Basil Rathbone in play by his wife, Ouida based on Arthur Conan Doyle stories. Reginald Denham directed cast with Jarmilla Novotna, Jack Raine.

## Current Theatre Reviews

Ladies of the Corridor-Longacre 10/22/53. Trio of fine performances by Edna Best, Betty Field and Frances Starr in Dorothy Parker' and Arnold D'Usseau's realistic drama about a group of lonely widows in a NY hotel won top notices from all the drama critics. But Atkinson, Times, and Chapman, News, couldn't okay the proceedings in the Walter Fried production because they found it in sum uninteresting. Though still on the majority "pro" side Kerr, Herald Tribune, and Coleman, Mirror, noted further cutting of the script would be helpful. Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, summed it up as a three ring circus for actresses, an episodic affair filled with juicy roles. Watts, Post, found it on the glum side, but with plenty of dramatic power. Harold Clurman's direction was praised by most.

Frogs of Spring-Broadhurst 10/20/53. Tenuous and skimpy is how all but one of the NY daily reviewers rated Nathaniel Benchley's adaption of his "New Yorker" short stories concerning two young couples in NY. Hawkins, WT&S, was the exception. He tabbed the Lyn Austin & Thomas Noyes production a gentle, human and very humorous account of small town life in the big city. Anthony Ross, Hiram Sherman, Haila Stoddard and Barbara Baxley were all praised. Other critics agreed that certain scenes were funny and some of the dialogue bright, but not enough to make the comedy worth seeing. Several of the critics hoped that Benchley's next would be funnier.

Atkinson, Times, placed part of the blame on director Burgess Meredith. While Kerr, Herald Tribune, listed it merely as desultory entertainment with a lackadaisical air. Meredith subbed the third night for Ross who lost his voice. Show was rumored to close, but producers announced it would continue.

Knight of the Burning Pestle- Theatre De Lys- 10/23/53. Unusual set of reviews filed against the first repertory program of Miranda d'Ancona and Audrey Hillard at the Greenwich Village theatre. Hawkins, WT&S, sole critic to enjoy the production of Francis Beaumont's 17th century comedy. He praised Robert Wummett and May Daw for fine comic portrayals. But most of the other critics panned the acting company for failing completely to adopt their acting to the proper style needed for such a play. Atkinson, Times, didn't mention the names of the cast in his "con" review. Kerr, Herald Tribune, fears the cast mistakes energy for hilarity. Watts, Post, is still waiting to see a professional production of the much talked about, but seldom produced come dy.

## Hits Revisited

Though still a funny script Seven Year Itch's leads, Tom Ewell and Vanessa Brown have slipped out of their parts and could use some re-direction, notes Hobe, Variety.

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' Village Theatre '

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Second play of Theatre de Lys Repertory opens Oct 27. Moon In Capricorn, a new play by James Leo Herlihy. Knight of Burning Pestle, which opened Oct 23 will alterate playing dates...What's Up, a new musical show about pulp magazines, rockets and romance, opens at Provincetown Oct 27.

Have You Heard This One, Paul Leslie's new play at the Cherry Lane, tabbed a workmanlike playwriting job on a stale theme by Jess, Variety. But it was found worthwhile as an opportunity for the actor-playwright to see his script of a family fight and as a showcase for some okay performance.

Emperor's Clothes, presented at Greenwich Mews, was panned by Calta, Times as a poor production which lacks expert acting, bold staging and imaginative projection.

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' Off Broadway '

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Shakespeare Guild Festival Company presents Othello at Jan Hus Oct 29 with Earle Hyman and Blanche Cholet...Everyman, which had been playing at Jan Hus is hunting for an Off Broadway house...The Old Man of the Mountain, Norman Nicholson's verse play, to be presented by Hunter College Theatre Workshop Nov 6 and 7...Davenport Theatre production of Mother Riba suspended.

Late Arrival, Blackfriars Guild production of Charles Oxtan's comedy of family life, won 4 mild pro votes from Shanley, Times, Coleman, Mirror, McClain, Journal American, and Sheaffer, Eagle. Pleasant, light comedy with fair acting is how most rated it. But "LDK", Women's Wear, found it lacking in stimulation, while he would like to see the actors in something more challenging.

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' Theatre Record Comments '

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"Macbeth, RCA album with Alec Guinness and Pamela Brown, approved by Times "RP" and Kupferberg, Herald Tribune. latter noted version is out, not complete, as advertised.

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' Theatre Book Comment '

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3 theatre yearbooks were reviewed by Downing, Variety. George Jean Nathan's "Theatre in the Fifties" (Knopf) was rated typical Nathan, intelligent, sometimes acerbic, warmly pro Shaw and vigorously anti-Hollywood. "Best Plays of 1952-53" edited by Louis Kronenberger contains many new features, while his digest of plays are as serviceable as digests can be. Reviewer notes that book misspells Bernardine. "Theatre '53" edited by John Chapman (Random House) is much like the Dodd Mead book, but Chapman's index is poorly composed.

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' Theatre TV Comment '

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King Lear, CBS TV Omnibus production, won top praise for Orson Welles while most of the critics were upset about Peter Brook's 73 minute digest of the classic. Watts, Post, sole drama critic to comment, suggested that Welles may be the Lear the theatre has been waiting for.

Front Page, Broadway TV Theatre production, miscast E.E. Horton as Walter Burns, Gould, Times, and Van Horn, WTBS, agreed.

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' CD Services '

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**WORST AUDIENCE...**The most dismal audience is the so-called "society" first nighters, pans Chapman, News. While the ordinary first night crowd-agents, critics, scouts, professionals and theatre fans are actually warm, generous, intelligent and appreciative. But the posh party, which murdered The Little Hut, is poison, its manners are bad, its wits dim. The comedy by its third night, when the critic returned, was going fine with the audience chuckling gaily at some British nonsense.

**COLUMN TIPS...**Audrey Hepburn was turned down as "too immature" for Stratford's Romeo and Juliet, whispers Kilgallen...31 lines of Richard III got into Orson Welles Lear, reports Gardner...Josh Logan's collapse has depressed NYC, notes Winchell...Broadway entrance of Hellinger to be a men's clothing store, hears Wilson.

**ACTORS DEFINED...**To perform his job the actor must be able to make his body and his voice perform every nuance and shading he demands of them, points out Burr, Playbill. The actor must be able to understand the motives and well-springs of all types and varieties of other people. And he must be able to open his heart to the emotional realities of others.

**DRAMA MAILBAG...**Booking of straight plays into large houses like Alvin and Century is deplorably unfair to the average theatregoer, complains a Variety reader. In such houses it is impossible for balcony seat buyers to hear...Drama critics aren't playing fair in comparing the NY production of The Little Hut to the London production which they didn't see, points out a "CD" reader.

**CRITICAL THOUGHTS...**By following the advice of the NY critics, End As A Man has merely shifted its confusion, reviews Watts, Post. The rewriting lacks clarity, directness and conviction...Christopher Marlowe wrote all the plays and poems of Shakespeare claims drama critic Calvin Hoffmann who showed the NY reporters a photograph of a portrait discovered nine months ago in England. According to his theory Marlowe wasn't slain but was sent in exile to France after the famed barroom brawl. Shakespeare then claimed Marlowe's work. Jonson and Bacon cults please take note.

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' Broadway TV Theatre '

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Seventh Heaven, Austin Strong's long run hit, will be produced on WOR TV Broadway TV Theatre Oct 26-30 at 7 30 PM with Geraldine Brooks and Hurd Hatfield. Helen Menken and George Gaul starred in the 1922 hit which played 704 performances at the Booth. The John Golden production won a split decision from the critics, but only Benchley, Life,

panned the star. Some of critics thought script was too mushy, while rest thought Menken's performance made up for it. Silent film version in 1927 starred Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell, while talkie version in 1937 featured Simone Simon and James Stewart. Cole Porter has been considering turning story into musical for some time.

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' Pros & Cons by TMK '

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With more and more "Off Broadway" productions being reviewed, critics would be wise to remember that not all presentations are equal in standards, quality and box offices prices. A show with a \$3 top must be judged as harshly as a regular Broadway show, but a house with a "voluntary admission" price should not have to compete with Broadway at all.

Late Arrival, which opens the Blackfriars 13th season, is a pleasant comedy that can be enjoyed if you aren't in too critical a mood. The stock characters borrowed from plays about teen-agers are performed nicely enough. Nothing outstanding, but nothing to complain about either.

NYC mayoralty candidates may not agree on many subjects, but Rudolph Halley, Harold Riegelman and Robert Wagner, Jr. agreed that much can be done physically to improve Broadway. They expressed their opinions on "honky-tonks", bookies, shooting galleries, etc at the October "Drama Desk" meeting of the NY theatre reporters and editors.

Halley and Wagner were more concerned with the "undesirable" characters who frequent the Broadway area than they were with the Coney Island type amusements. All expressed the thought that a simple "get-tough" order to the police department heads would do much to clean up the situation. Riegelman also would seek a new zoning law to discourage the midway kind of amusements on Broadway. The latter also suggested more free concerts and neighborhood block parties to make the city "gayer." The candidates were also agreed that the phony "charity collectors" in the Times Square area should be outlawed.

#### Plays

My 3 Angels will be presented by the Broadway cast at the Kingsbridge Veteran Hospital in the Bronx, Nov 1 at 6 PM...3 Broadway musicals started national tours Nov 28. Guys & Dolls opens in Baltimore, Wish You Were Here in Chicago and Porgy & Bess in Philadelphia...Old Vic will be seen at Metropolitan Opera House in Sept 1954.

#### People

Ben Gazzara, End As A Man, has been upped to stardom...Celeste Holm will star in His and Hers, the new Fay and Michael Kanin Comedy due in Jan.

#### Museum Show

"Distinguished Gadgets", a display of famed stage props from NY shows, is on view at the Museum of the City of NY Theatre Gallery.

#### Theatre Record Notes

Sound track of MGM "Kiss Me Kate" will be released by MGM records...Shirley Booth will record Time of the Cuckoo, for Caedmon Records... "Show Biz" record by R.M. has been postponed.

#### Theatre Obits

Louis Schaffer, drama and editor labor of the Jewish Daily Forward and producer of 1937 hit Pins and Needles revue, died at age 64 of a heart ailment.

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